

Water Heater Maintenance

When the weather turns cooler there is nothing better than a hot bath or shower to stay warm. Therefore, it is essential to properly maintain your water heater. Proper water heater maintenance will also make your home safer from electrical or gas problems, and will help prevent a leaky water heater or a water heater explosion. Here are some tips for maintaining a safe and functional water heater:

- Keep your water heater thermostat set at or below 120 degrees F. Water temperatures above 120 degrees can severely scald your skin. The thermostat on your water heater can be found under one of the service panels (a rectangle- shaped cover) on electric water heaters or near the gas valve on gas-fired water heaters. Shut off the electric supply to the heater before adjusting the thermostat if the unit is electric.
- Flush the water heater once a month to drain sediment that has accumulated in the tank. This will increase the life of your water heater. Drain the water heater by opening the drain valve near the bottom of the tank and letting the water flow out for several minutes. If necessary, attach a hose to the valve and drain outside or into your floor drain. You may want to purchase an appropriately sized (5/8" or 3/4 ") cap for the drain valve in case it does not fully seat after draining.
- If you have an older water heater and you have not been flushing it or testing the pressure relief valve, you may need to contact a qualified plumber for advice. Significant amounts of sediment may have accumulated in your water heater and the drain and pressure relief valves will likely be clogged. These valves may need to be replaced. Electric water heaters will require occasional replacement of the heating elements. This is usually a simple task but requires the proper tools, turning off the electricity and water (to the water heater) and draining it.
- If you have a gas-fired water heater, make sure it is properly ventilated and has no obstructions in the vent pipes or in front of the combustion chamber. Do not place insulation over the draft hood (the cone-shaped vent cover at the top of the unit) or over the flame chamber opening (at the bottom of the unit). If you do not already have one, contact a qualified plumber or gas professional to install an automatic gas shutoff valve on the gas line serving your water heater. Install and maintain a carbon monoxide detector in the vicinity of your gas water heater. Make sure that there is adequate combustion air from the exterior for your altitude. High altitude units are recommended above 2,500 feet. Please do not place combustible materials anywhere near the flame or in the enclosure. Make sure that the vent termination on the roof is sound and is animal proof.
- You can expect your water heater to last up to 12 or even 20 years with proper and regular maintenance.
- If you need assistance with any repairs or maintenance procedures, contact a qualified and reputable plumber.